DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 959 CS 013 722

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TITLE Zone of Proximal Development in Reading.
PUB DATE 1999-10-22
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basal Reading; Elementary Education; *Language Experience Approach; Multiple Intelligences; *Reading Diagnosis; Reading Material Selection; *Supplementary Reading Materials
IDENTIFIERS *Zone of Proximal Development

ABSTRACT

The zone of proximal development provides guidance to the teacher in taking care of selected prerequisites, prior to pupils doing the actual reading. Three models are presented and elaborated upon to indicate what can be done to fulfill requirements of the zone of proximal reading. The zone may be applied in relation to reading from basal texts through the process of ascertaining present reading levels, realizing ideal reading levels, noting the zone of proximal development and providing applicable activities and experiences, and reappraising the zone to take care of deficiencies. The zone may be fulfilled in student self-selection of reading materials through selection of sequential library books and student-teacher reading conferences evaluating the student's progress. With relation to the Language Experience Approach (LEA), the zone of proximal development may be applied through the following steps: involving objects in the reading process, talking about them, writing down the discussion, and reading what has been written down. Multiple Intelligences Theory may be used in assisting pupils to reveal what has been learned. (EF)

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Zone of Proximal Development in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

1999-10-22

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ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT IN READING

The Zone of Proximal Development concept, accredited to Len Vygotsky (6) has received considerable attention in educational literature. This Zone emphasizes a range in which a child can perform a task, only with the help of a more experienced individual.

Thus, there is a present achievement level of a pupil in reading. The identified level is where the pupil comprehends and understands well what is being read. Here, the recreational level in reading is being emphasized whereby the learner reads fluently with comprehension. The recreational level may be compared with the frustration level in which the number of unidentified words are too numerous which, in return, makes any meaningful understanding of content impossible, even with the best available reading teacher.

Thus, the Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes the differences between the recreational reading level vs. an ideal goal to achieve which is possible with quality teaching.

Teaching Reading

What is the role of the Zone of Proximal Development as a concept for reading teachers to emphasize? First, the teacher needs to ascertain the present achievement reading level of a pupil. This can be done through having a pupil read content, orally/silently, and then be able to indicate meaning through answering vital questions covering the content, retelling the completed story, and/or dramatizing selected ideas, among other approaches. These learning opportunities should indicate to the teacher the present level of pupil reading achievement (1).

From the current achievement level, the pupil needs to realize an ideal which is achieving vital objectives in reading. To achieve the new objectives, the teacher needs to take careful note of the zone of proximal development of the individual learner. What must the professional reading teacher do to provide the necessary activities and experiences within the zone? To guide optimal pupil progress in achieving the new reading objectives, the teacher may:

1. Discuss the pictures directly related to the selection to be read.
2. Assist pupils to relate the content discussed in the pictures to their very own personal experiences.
3. Have pupils then predict what the new reading selection will be about.
4. Draw pupil attention to possible new words in the text by having each learner view words on the chalkboard.
5. Motivate pupils to read the subject matter with attention securing devices such as illustrations brought to class relating to what will be read (2).

The Zone of Proximal Development and its requirements may be further appraised after the reading activity has been completed. Thus, deficiencies noted in the follow-up may be taken care of with quality learning opportunities. These experiences might emphasize the following:

1. Noticing which words pupils fail to identify during oral reading.
2. Evaluating the kinds of errors made here, such as use of context clues and recognizing initial consonants of unknown words.
3. Comprehending important facts, concepts, and generalizations read.

4. Engaging in critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving.
5. Summarizing important ideas read (3).

Self Selection of Library Books

The Zone of Proximal Development may be fulfilled when learners choose sequential library books to read. An adequate number of library books on diverse genres need to be available to pupils so each may choose narrative or expository books to read. These books need to be on different reading levels for slow, average, and proficient readers. Each learner then needs to be able to read subject matter on his/her own reading level. It is important that pupils individually select a library book to read that is challenging and yet understandable. Thus, a pupil may read in an optimal manner of achievement.

How does the Zone of Proximal Development relate to pupil self selection of reading materials?

1. Pupils ideally choose a library book which is on their reading or comprehension level.
2. Learners, too, select reading materials sequentially whereby the contents can be understood.
3. They choose narrative/expository reading materials based on personal interests.
4. Individuals pick genres which possess perceived purpose.
5. He/she paces the act of reading according to personal skills and abilities possessed.

In a conference with the teacher, following the reading of a library book, follow-up activities may remedy weakness from individualized reading. Here, the pupil may indicate achievement by:

1. Reading a self selected portion to reveal word recognition proficiency.
2. Discussing the content read from the library book through teacher or pupil chosen questions.
3. Revealing attitudes toward the book completed in reading through feelings exhibited pertaining to characterization, setting, plot, theme, point of view, and sequence of content (4).

Language Experience Approach

The Zone of Proximal Development operates differently in the Language Experience Approach (LEA) as compared to reading from the basal text or pupil self selection of reading materials.

With LEA, the teacher may have objects at a learning station for pupils to see, observe carefully, and discuss. After chances for reflective thinking, pupils provide ideas to the teacher to print onto a chalkboard or type into a word processor with an accompanying screen. Pupils presenting the content may then see talk "written down" by the teacher. After completing the recording on the experience chart, pupils together with the teacher read the recorded content. The latter points to words and phrases when reading aloud. The contents may be reread so that pupils develop a basic sight vocabulary.

Analyzing the LEA in terms of the Zone of Proximal Development, the following

conclusions are in evidence:

1. Needed background information for pupils came from noticing and discussing objects at the learning station.
2. This information was used by pupils to provide content for the experience chart.
3. Learners saw content given, written or typed by the teacher.
4. The teacher read the content pointing to words and phrases as the read aloud progressed.
5. Pupils now should be ready for reading.
6. Rereading may be done as often as is necessary or desired.

Steps numbered one through four above should take care of fulfilling requirements in the zone of proximal development. Steps five and six provide opportunities for the teacher to take care of deficiencies in pupil reading.

Conclusion

The zone of proximal development provides guidance to the teacher to take care of selected prerequisites, prior to pupils doing the actual reading. Three models were presented and elaborated upon to indicate what can be done to fulfill requirements of the zone of proximal development. Multiple Intelligences Theory (5) may be used in assisting pupils to reveal what has been learned, by using different methods and procedures.

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